THE LOST DUTCHMAN

Wierd Occurrence Experienced By Prospectors Who Sought Lost Mine in the Superstition Mountains and Found a Clue to a Tragedy.

(By James F. McDonald)

"Oh once I owned a burro and I
bought him for a song,
He wasn't so very handsome but
he carried me along."

Dussard was in a very merry mood and was singing, without much regard for metre or music, one of the old frontier songs that have passed from the memories of all except the pioneers who have survived the ravages of time and hardship. The song stopped abruptly; evidently something interesting had developed in Dussard's gold pan; it was only of momentary interest, however, for the song was resumed again, though not at the point where the vocalist had left off.

"Oh in some lonesome can-e-e-yon
my pan of dirt I try,
There is not a color in it, 'twould
cause the hardest heart to cry."

The song dwindled to a hum, and gradually increased again with the refrain:

"For my bronco's gone to San Simon to carry Curly Bill."

The blazing June sun in which we had ridden all day had set, the white, hot looking zenith assumed a deep blue, and the horizon, jagged with the spires of distant mountains took on a rosy tint. The cool, scentless breeze, that follows sunset on the desert began to blow, and I sat down with my back against an old mesquite stump and fell to contemplating the scene that surrounded me. We mining engineers are prosaic creatures, and are little given to flights of imagination. Our trade is to make money for others and there is little romance in money making. It is a matter of facts, and what imagination enters into mining ventures must be supplied by someone other than the engineer; his business is to supply facts. But as the rude old composer of Dussard's song had observed, the hardest hearts sometimes cry, and so also may a lonesome desert scene make the most practical sort of a man reminiscent or sentimental.

The Deserted Camp

The words of the old song, which I had often heard my father sing, brought back the past, and I soon fell into a reverie. Some thirty years before, my parents had been residents of the old ruined town at which I was camped. But how changed was every thing, and how thoroughly was the old Arizona obliterated. In my father's time the Pinal Mill, whose ruins I was contemplating with half closed eyes, was in operation. It crushed the ore from the famous Silver King mine, the tales of whose richness seem past belief in these days. Great masses of solid silver weighing into the hundreds of pounds had been taken from this remarkable mine, and during the course of active production millions of dollars in bullion had gone through the little town of Pinal, which was as sinful and care free as it was prosperous. I was one of the toddling youngsters of the town repeating in imperfect accents the eloquent profanity of the teamsters, and fondly looking forward to the time when I too would become a master of the jerk line, drive a twenty mule team and "cuss a blue streak." Now nothing was left of the once magnificent mill except crumpled and rusted machinery. The roofs of the houses had fallen, and the rabbits burrowed and played among the disintegrating walls. Gone were the last of the cavaliers, the miner and the cowboy. Gone, too, were the gambler and his scarlet mistress. Gone were the days when men ignored law and arbitrated their difficulties with cold steel and hot lead. All had followed to oblivion the Apache from whom they wrung the land.

Among the houses was one of stone that had survived the onslaughts of the elements, in all probability the home of the superintendant of the mill, and like a hardy old man it was trying, in spite of difficulties, to keep up a brave appearance. A mormon family composing the entire population of Pinal, had taken possession of the old veteran. One of their number started a wheezy phonograph and my reverie was brought to a close by a raucous rendition of "Ma Ann Eliza."

When Luck Fails.

Just before dark, Dussard, the peculiar physical and mental enigma, who had been my companion for the past week, slouched into the camp from the creek where he had been at work with the gold pan. I had found him companionable in a way because of his knowledge of the world and his acquaintance with general literature. He had no imagination or appreciation for the beautiful. His heaven and cosmos were summed up in the word utility. The occasional singing of snatches of old songs was his only departure from the habitual gravity that was part of his nature. I have never met a more cold or practical sort of man, and it was mainly his lack of imagination that caused me to think that the story of the lost Dutchman Mine might be true.

"Well, what luck?" I inquired.

"Nothing doing," he replied inconically. "I have panned every ledge and stringer in this neck of the woods, and I have never found anything worth looking at the second time. It looks as if there will never be another mine found around here except the King. I guess I'll quit the Pinals altogether and make one more trip into the Superstition Mountains to look for the Lost Dutchman."

I looked at him with a good deal of surprise, for the first lost mine still remains to be found, and to hear that my hardheaded, practical friend believed in such a chimera seemed ludicrous in the extreme.

"Don't you think it would be about as profitable to look for Captain Kidd's buried treasure here in the valley?" I replied, with a tinge of irony, for if there is anything that is anethema to the experienced mining man it is the lost mine. Spanish records, handed down by pioneers and traditions teem with accounts of lost mines of phenomenal richness, and while they have provided much material for novelists, not one of them has ever produced a dollar's worth of bullion.

My sarcasm was wasted on Dussard, for he gravely replied, "if you had all the stuff that is cached in these old hills and flats, you would not have to bother your head about Captain Kidd."

Robbers and Buried Treasure

"How is that," I inquired.

"Well," he answered, "you know that the King was one of the richest mines ever found in the west, and the old timers understood high grading as well as the boys of these days. Thousands of dollars in high grade was stolen by the miners from the King company, and strange to say, very little of it ever got out of the country. It lies hidden, but God only knows where. The boys were closely watched, and many a man who has since gone to the beyond, if there is such a place, has got a comfortable stake buried around here simply because he could never get his high grade together and get out of the country. Then those who did manage to get away from the camps with the rich stuff fell into the hands of the hold up men and rustlers that infested the country in the seventies and eighties, and the bandits in turn generally lost their lives before they had the opportunity to realize any pleasure from their ill gotten gains. The result is that most of the ore that was stolen from the King is still in the country.

"Two of these robbers are almost as much of a mystery as the Lost Dutchman itself. One was young and the other was old, and they robbed everything from a stage to a poor prospecter. Dozens of the high graders fell into their hands, and were plucked clean, for these thieves, differed from most of the chivalrous Dick Turpins of the time in the respect that they were entirely without mercy. They took everything that their victims possessed, and often murdered them for not having more. Their activity ceased suddenly and they dropped out of sight without leaving a trace behind themselves after eluding sheriffs, Indian trailers and blood hounds for over six years."

Story of Lost Dutchman

"Yes," I replied, "that is a pretty good trump for the Lost Dutchman, John. I had no idea you were such a romancer, but on the square, do you really believe that old tale about the Lost Dutchman, and where do you find that it has more merit than fifty similar stories?"

"I can't say that I do believe it," he answered "but I can't say that I don't. I saw the Dutchman alone once in Phoenix, and he was spending money like a prince. He got the money from some source or other and the locality from which he got it seems to be the Superstition Range."

Dussard was so sincere that I became interested I asked him to give me his version of the story, and he began.

"The Lost Dutchman was found by an old German in the late seventies, and was worked by him up to the eighties, when he suddenly stopped making his periodical visits to Phoenix where he came to lay in a stock of provisions and for relaxation in the shape of protracted sprees. During these visits he exhibited considerable amounts of rich ore and gold dust and was always well supplied with money as well. His departure was suddenly made, and although many prospectors and others attempted to follow him on various occasions he managed to outwit them. He went in the direction of the Superstition Mountains, but he always traveled just before or during a storm, and his trail was washed out almost as soon as made. To attempt to follow him very closely was dangerous, for he was not only a tough looking customer, but was bad clear through as well, and would kill a man without very much reason. He told very little about himself except that he lived at his mine with an Apache squaw that had been banished by her people for breaking some of the tribal laws. He claimed to have had a partner whom no one had ever seen, however On one of the last visits he was known to have made to Phoenix he showed great agitation, and while in his cups intimated that his partner had lost his life. He said he was disgusted with his life and was going back to the old country to live the rest of his days, and that the secret of his mine would go with him. He was as good as his word, and he dropped out of sight, never to be heard from again."

"That in turn is a pretty good trump for your bandit story," I remarked. "How in the world did you ever come to believe such ridiculous tales?"

"Truth is stranger than fiction," he replied, "and I have good reasons for thinking that there is something in the story. Didn't I see him blowing in money at Phoenix, and don't I remember it as well as if it was yesterday? I can never forget him, for if ever the devil was pictured in a human countenance that face was the Dutchman's. Futhermore my old friend, Al Sieber, followed his trail right into the Superstition Mountains one time, but lost it in a blinding snow storm. Al was the greatest of the scouts, if not the best known. No man was better qualified to ferret out the Dutchman's secret, for he read signs as we read books, and a man's word was more reliable."

Mention of Al Siebler's name clinched my interest in the story, for he was a practical sort of man and would never be given to rainbow chasing As Dussard had said, Sieber was one of the greatest of scouts, not excepting Bud Williams and Kit Carson themselves, and if he failed to keep the Dutchman's trail it was useless for anybody else to attempt it.

Decide Upon Search

Dussard's enthusiasm was infectious, and before long I decided to accompany him on a prospecting trip into the Superstition Range though without any persuasion on his part. I still had no hope of finding a mine on such flimsy data, but the interest that men who should have known better took in the tale aroused my curosity Two days travel brought us into the Superstition Mountains.

A short reconisance, to a man with my knowledge of geology was enough to convince me of the futiltiy of looking for a mine in the Superstition Range. An ancient lava flow has covered the entire region to a depth of several feet and has made it impossible to determine the character of the underlying formation, and whether there are ore bearing ledges beneath the lava is even a more difficult mystery to solve than that of the Lost Dutchman. We had hardly entered the mountains before I pointed out the fact to Dussard, but he was persistent, and refused to return to civilization so long as our supply of food lasted.

In addition to the apparent uselessness of looking for a mine among such unpromising geological conditions, my spirits were still further lowered by the desolation and lonesomeness of my surroundings. This range has been aptly named the Superstition Mountains, for it would be impossible to imagine a gloomier or more depressing place. The mountains get their name for the awe in which they are held by the Apache Indians who believe them to be haunted by the evil one and his myrmidons, and no redskin, however great his courage may be, could be persuaded to spend the night within the confines of the range. The mountains are exceptionally rough and sparsely timbered. The wind, blowing continously through innumerable small caverns in the precipitous walls of deep canyons, makes a peculiar moaning sound that at night an imaginative mind might easily construe to be the wailing of lost spirits. No game, with the exception of a few fool quail, are to be found there. Seemingly even the brutes are unable to bear the moaning of the wind, and the general depression of animal spirits that obtains in this haunted atmosphere.

Search Appears Fruitless

A week of wandering among the crags and rocks was productive of no tangible results. Dussard had remarkable endurance and energy, and though he did all the cooking and work other than prospecting, I was hardly able to follow the sinewey old man. During our travels we came upon several old trails, which we followed and which invariably led us to the top of some precipice where the trail was lost or obliterated. This was something that puzzled Dussard, with his lifetime of experience among mountains. Trails made by men are intended to lead from some place to someplace, but these apparently were made by gnomes of long long ago as a sort of a practical joke on inquisitive mortals that would unravel the secrets of this mysterious range. One day after a particularly arduous climb over a trail somewhat more distinct than any we had encountered, we came upon an old cabin beneath a bluff that was almost entirely covered with wild grape vines. So effectually was it hidden that had Dussard not been with me I should never have discovered its existence.

"This looks good" exclaimed Dussard. "I have talked with dozens of men who have explored this range, and I never heard one of them speak of finding anything like this. Perhaps it is the Dutchman's cabin."

In The Dutchman's Cabin

The cabin contained but one room, which was rather large for a primitive mountain habitation. It was partly excavated in the bluff, and was walled up in front with rock laid in mud mortar. At one end was a rectangular hole that probably had served as a door and at the other, a smaller one that served the purpose of a window. Built into the rock wall was a fireplace, about which were strewn some rusted pots and pans. In the centre of the cabin was a table hewn from cedar, and three ungainly chairs of the same material, both of which bore the marks of the roughest kind of workmanship. Everything looked as if the place had been deserted only a short time before, but the deep layer of dust on the floor without a foot print of even an insect showed that it had not been inhabited for years.

"This is a damned peculiar place," said Dussard, "What gets me is that while it has not seen a man for twenty-five or thirty years everything is as solid as when it was built, and the animals have so much respect for it that not even a spider has cast a web on the walls. Rattlers like such places as this to live in, but there is not a track of a rattler in the dust, and as there is not a snake skin around it shows that no snake has been here. If any had lived here this is the place he would have shed. Funny old hills are these Superstition Mountains."

An uncontrollable feeling of depression came over me and I said, "I'm not superstitious, but I wish I were someplace else. These mountains certainly get on my nerves."

"You will have to sleep in here tonight, though," he replied. From the way the thunder is rumbling we are going to have a storm."

"I don't like the place myself, but anything is better than trying to sleep in the rain."

Both of us were tired, and after eating a hasty supper and hobbling our pack animals we turned in. Thunder began to boom, lightening flashes threw a hideous glare through the chinks in the cabin, and rain began to fall in torrents. Gusts of wind tearing through the crags and caverns with uncontrolled fury varied the continual moaning with fierce shrieks and howls, which mingling with the roars of thunder sounded like a battle of fiends. My already depressed spirits gave way to a sensation of unspeakable gloom and foreboding. Fatigue did not bring sleep. Words cannot describe my feelings. I have read extensively, but I know of no author who has put such sensations on paper unless it be the morbid Poe in the opening paragraphs of The Fall of the House of Usher. Dussard, too, who usually fell into a sound sleep quickly, did not rest well, but tossed about among his blankets as if suffering from some torment. I longed to be away, somewhere, anywhere; I longed for daylight, for anything that would alleviate the cursed mental strain.

The Psychical Phenomenon

I fell asleep finally. How long I had been sleeping I do not know, but it must have been several hours, when I suddenly awakened with a start. A sickly yellowish light filled the cabin. Sitting at the table was an old man dressed in the garb of the trappers of forty years ago; buckskin hunting shirt, leggings, and a light colored slouch hat. His body was small and undersized, and his head grotesquely large like the pictures of gnomes that German decorative artists are given to fashioning, but no gnomish good nature of munificence beamed from his countenance. His nose was big and hooked, his eyes small and avericious, and all the lineaments of his face were expressive of brutality and intemperance. He sat perfectly quiet and did not make a sound. At first I was puzzled how anyone could enter without waking us, but after contemplating him for some moments I discovered that he was not of this world, for I could see the rocks in the wall through his attenuated body. In a few moments another specter entered, a young man similarly attired, with a sack on his shoulder.

His features were hard and determined, but he had none of the malignity of the older man. He stepped noiselessly to the table, and emptied the sack before the old man, who had the air of authority. From the sack fell pieces of ore, bullion, and coin, but not a sound disturbed the silence of the room as the metal struck the table. They began to gesticulate, and their lips moved as if engaged in an animated conversation, but not a sound broke the stillness It appeared that the young man wanted his partner to leave the place, and go on a journey, but the old fellow was undecided, he who seemed to be trying to persuade him that they had enough treasure. The old man wanted to go, but the love of gold was too much for him and he would run his fingers through the pile of gold and silver and caress it as a young mother does her first born.

At this juncture a squaw stepped in the doorway, unperceived by the two men. She was a fitting consort for the old man, so hideous were her looks, and the natural horror her villainous face inspired was further accentuated by her nose, which had been cut entirely from her face—the penality that Apaches wreck on a woman for violating the tribal marriage customs. She watched the mummery interestedly, with glances of hate toward the younger man and love toward his detestible companion. When the old fellow shook his head her face brightened, but when he seemed about to give way her hand would fall upon a knife that lay in her bosom and her face would take on a fierce choleric aspect. It was plain that she thought her lover would succumb to the harangue of his partner. Finally the old man seemed to accede to some proposition that had been made. The squaw's face took on an aspect of despair, but it was not the despair of resignation, but rather that of the cornered wolf, who having no hope for himself, is determined that his life shall be sold as dearly as possible. Her lover was about to desert her—something worse than death itself to the woman. Like a flash she crossed the room, and drove the knife, with a wriggling motion into her enemy's back, and he fell to the floor open mouthed and open eyed. Just then Dussard exclaimed, "O Christ."

The old harridan looked in our direction. Her mouth opened as if making a shriek, and she advanced toward us with the ferociousness and fury of a maddened tiger. I closed my eyes, expecting to be swept into hell.

"God Almighty, man, let's get out of here."

Dussard was speaking. I opened my eyes again. The first rays of the morning sun were filling through the chinks in the cabin, and Dussard was on his knees making the sign of the cross.

"Was it a dream?" I asked.

"Dream, hell," he replied. "That old devil was the Dutchman. It is all plain enough to me now. His partner was killed all right enough, but there was no mine. The Dutchman and his partner were none other than the mysterious bandits we were talking about that night at Pinal."

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MRS. MARY O'DONNELL,
Lander, Wyo.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this July 14, 1909.
CHARLEY ALLEN, Notary Public, In and for Fremont Co., Wyo.

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